Kingsbridge Urban District Council.

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1908.

Gentlemen,—I have the honour to submit to you my 15th annual report, dealing with the health matters of your district for the year ending December 31st, 1908.

Following the suggestions contained in the memorandum issued by the Local Government Board for the guidance of Medical Officers of Health in the compilation of their annual reports, I will commence by referring firstly to the Physical Features and General Characteristics of this district regarded from a health point of view.

The district consists essentially of two different areas—one a low-lying part stretching from the Estuary, and the other consisting of several small hills rising to a height of over 100 feet above sea level. The lower area comprises most of the older buildings in the town; and notably in Ebrington-street and Market-place the dwellings on the east side labour under the disadvantage of being built against the hillside, and as a consequence their gardens and back courts are in many instances at a higher level than the ground floors of the houses. This condition curtails the supply of sunlight and fresh air, which are the more needed in that many of the cottages have their ground floors paved with stone, all these

conditions having a tendency to generate damp. The public thoroughfares in the district are fairly wide, and are well drained and maintained. There are practically no back-to-back dwellings; but in some of the courts, notably those off Fore-street, the approaches are narrow, and there is a marked deficiency of light in the lower rooms.

Occupation of Inhabitants.

The chief industries comprise a Steam Flour Mill, an Iron Foundry and Engineering Works, and a Carriage Building Works. Malting is also carried on to a small extent. The number of Malt Kilns is being gradually reduced, pointing to a decrease of that industry. With the exception of the above the occupation of the inhabitants is chiefly commercial, the town of Kingsbridge, being the centre of an agricultural district.

House Accommodation: Adequacy and Fitness.

The accommodation in the various houses is generally adequate for the number of their inhabitants, and the dwellings have as a rule sufficient air space surrounding them.

Supervision over the erection of new houses.

All new buildings in the district are erected under conditions complying with the bye-laws of your Authority, which have been duly approved and sanctioned by the Local Government Board.

Water Supply.

The supply from all your sources has been pure, and quite sufficient in amount for the whole district. All the sources have maintained their average amounts. The question however of the better distribution of the

supplies to certain portions of your district has received the serious consideration of your authority during the year, and one of the schemes suggested by your surveyor Mr. Monson, is to be brought forward with a view to adopting a better distribution of available supplies of water.

Milk Supply.

The Milk Supply of the district is furnished mainly by dairies within your area, with two important exceptions.

The Dairies, Cowsheds, and Milkshops Order is in operation and the various premises, &c., have been periodically inspected, generally with satisfactory results.

Foods.

Working of the Food and Drugs Act. Your officers have received no instructions to obtain samples for analysis under the above act, but I am informed that the police have taken samples of milk and butter during the year, which on examination proved to be good.

Sewage and Drainage.

The district has a system of water-borne sewage, discharging into the Estuary some mile below the town. The various sewers are constantly under supervision, and an efficient method of flushing is in operation. House drains are subjected to periodic inspection, and, where defects are discovered, means for remedying the same are adopted. One of the chief of these defects is the want of flushing-cisterns in the closets. Now that there is an increased supply of water for the district, Non-waste Flushing Cisterns should be provided to ensure efficient flushing.

Pollution of Rivers and Streams.

These as far as I am aware are not polluted by sewage. The whole of the town drainage however discharges into the Tidal Estuary some mile below the main portion of the town.

The removal and disposal of House Refuse, etc.

This has been satisfactorily carried out during the year. I would, however, again state that your bye-law with regard to the provision of properly covered sanitary utensils for the collection of house refuse, etc., is only being very partially complied with; as a consequence the pavements and gutters are often in the early mornings strewn with offensive and objectionable matter. I have during the year drawn your authority's attention to this subject, and as a consequence your authority caused handbills to be printed and circulated, but I am sorry to say little attention has been paid to them.

Nuisances.

These have been of a minor nature, and have been dealt with and remedied upon my reporting the same to your Council.

Over Crowding.

I have not found it necessary to report any case of over crowding during the past year. With regard to house letting, lodgings, etc., your authority has not adopted any bye-laws, the same being only controlled by means of the provisions of the Public Health Act, 1875.

Infectious Diseases.

As formerly reported, your means of dealing with infectious diseases consists of compulsory notification, investigation of cases of infection, and disinfection where possible of the premises occupied. We still lack an

isolation and infectious disease hospital (*vide* previous annual reports concerning this provision).

During the year I have received as Medical Officer of Health, seventeen notifications of infectious diseases, viz. six of Scarlet Fever; five of Erysipelas; six of Diptheria, as against thirty cases notified during the year 1907. This large decrease is highly satisfactory, and the absence of Typhoid Fever, or any serious outbreak of Diphtheria speaks well for the efficiency of the drainage system generally.

Only one death occurred out of the seventeen cases notified, this being a case of diphtheria, the six cases of which occurred in the various parts of the town and were not confined to the lower area as was the case in 1907.

The six cases of Scarlet Fever were all of a mild type, and were sporadic cases.

Of the five cases of Erysipelas, three were facial and the remaining two were cases of limbs infected. Two occurred in the Workhouse both being of a mild form. I could not find any local insanitary conditions to account for any of the cases.

Your surveyor has disinfected the dwellings, etc., in all cases where I deemed it necessary.

Incidence of Disease.

Having regard to the distribution of the cases of infectious disease over the district, there would appear to be no particular incidence in any single locality.

Schools.

During the year I have not found it necessary to advise the closing of the Council Schools in your

district. I have upon my various visits found all the sanitary arrangement satisfactory.

Inspection.

I have during the year made many systematic inspections of the district, irrespective of those called for by any particular outbreak of disease, and have found very few sanitary defects. Those upon which I have reported have received your attention, and have in due course been remedied.

Vital Statistics.

During the year there have been registered sixty-two births, giving a Birth Rate of 20·5 per thousand of population. Forty-eight deaths have occurred during the same period, giving a general Death Rate from all causes of 16·0 per thousand. This is a higher rate than has been registered for some years.

There has been one death from the principal zymotic diseases, viz.:—one from diptheria.

Deaths of children under one year of age number four, being 6·2 per cent. of the total births and 8·3 per cent. of the total deaths registered. This compares favourably with the average for the last ten years.

The percentage of deaths of children under 5 years of the total deaths is 6·3.

Of the total forty-eight deaths in the district, twenty occurred at or beyond the age of 65, ten of these being over 80, and six being over 70 years.

Pulmonary Tuberculosis has accounted for three deaths, giving a mortality rate of 0·99 per thousand of population; last year the rate was 0·66 per thousand, and in 1906 it was 0·33.

Three deaths have been registered as due to cancer, making a total of thirty-three in the last 10 years.

There have been no deaths from Influenza, only five having occurred during the last 11 years.

There have been no deaths as a result of violence, or accident.

It is gratifying to note that the birth rate of 20·5 is above the average for the past 10 years.

Operation of the Factories and Workshops Act, 1901.

Under section 132 of the Factory and Workshops Act, 1901, it is my duty as Medical Officer of Health to your Council to report as follows:—

A register of workshops is kept by your Authority, and I have personally, together with your Inspector, from time to time inspected the workshops and work places in the district, and as regards (a) general cleanliness, (b) air space, (c) ventilation, and (e) provision of suitable sanitary arrangements, have found them satisfactory; I have failed to find that any home work is carried on.

Appended herewith is the table provided by request of the Secretary of State, showing the number of inspections of factories, workshops, work-places, and home workers' premises made during the year, the number of defects found as regards nuisances under Public Health Acts, and offences against the Factory and Workshops Act, and other matters.

Union Workhouse.

Four children have been born in the Workhouse during the past year, giving a birth rate of 39·5 per thousand of its population. Three of these were illegitimate.

There was one death of an infant under one year which was due to Congenital Syphilis, the child being 9 months old.

The total deaths at all ages number fourteen, giving a death rate of 138·6 per thousand; last year the rate was 147·. In 1905 it was 216·.

Of the total deaths, eight were certified as Senile Decay, the average age being 80·25 years.

There has been one death in the "house" from Pulmonary Tuberculosis, which is the same number as last year.

Two cases of infectious disease were notified as having occurred in the "house" during the year, viz.:—one Erysipelas (facial) and one Erysipelas (lower limbs). Both were of a mild type. Careful investigation failed to reveal any insanitary condition to account for these cases.

The general sanitary arrangements of the Workhouse are satisfactory.

Appended herewith are the tabular statements required by the Local Government Board, the contents of which I have furnished to the extent of the information in my possession.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

WILLIAM HY. WEBB,

Medical Officer of Health.

The Kingsbridge Urban District Council.